CBW

Number One
For PSV Professionals

COACH AND BUS WEEK March 15, 2006 **Issue 721** £2.50

1st with the news Now every Wednesday

THIS WEEK

Phil White

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CBW

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Full annual subscription rate for 51 issues:
UK £69, Europe/Eire £115, USA and rest of the world £140

www.cbwnet.co.uk

ISSN: 1351-3877

Printed by: William Gibbons & Sons

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Breaking point?

The connection between overweight coaches, the incidence of roadside attacks on buses, and the injuries sustained when coaches roll over may not be immediately apparent.

The common thread is glass. The addition of more glass to vehicles has created a new set of problems, and I am not convinced manufacturers and legislators have achieved the right balance. Balance is the operative word when we look at coach glass. The massive weight of double-glazing has its impact on GVW, unladen weights are close to practical limits.

Even on buses, glazing has a direct influence on performance; the more weight you carry, the more fuel you use, and yet the trend is to have bigger windows, with greater need for air conditioning and powerful ventilation, using even more fuel.

There is also concern in Europe about the injuries to passengers when a coach rolls on to its side, the windows break, and the passengers are dragged along the ground.

I mention all this because, as you will see on page 36, unbreakable, lightweight, scratch-resistant glazing materials have been developed which *could* provide an answer, but it seems that the rules for provision of emergency exits, in particular breakable windows, seem to get in the way of using such glazing.

I think it is time that the legislators and manufacturers - together, for once - look at this issue, and ask themselves whether the safety risk posed by using glass is, in fact, greater than the risk posed by introducing unbreakable glazing.

Now we're out on Wednesday, we're always earlier with the news... sometimes a month earlier. On February 9, *CBW* revealed that coach booking service UK Travel Solutions has £46,000 in unpaid bills for coach hire. On March 9, this same fact is 'revealed' by one of the free magazines. Well, you don't get 'owt for nowt'...

Mark Williams

Mark Williams
Editor

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:

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ABC

British Travel Trade Fair
1-2 March 2006
NEC, Birmingham

cpt

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When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

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Phil White to retire

NatEx chief exec and CPT president to call it a day

Chief executive of the National Express Group, and current CPT president, Phil White will retire by the end of the year.

Interviewed this week by *CBW* (pages 18-21), Mr White later announced his decision to retire coincident with the release of the NEG preliminary results (page 9). He says he has decided that, at 57, he wants to spend more time at home. But when he leaves, the CPT will be faced with finding an interim CPT President.

Mr White told *CBW* he is quitting while he's ahead: "I've had 10 good years as CEO of NEG and that's a long time. We've just had a very good year and, after achieving a six-year target of acquiring [Spanish express coach operator] Alsa, I've decided it's time to step down.

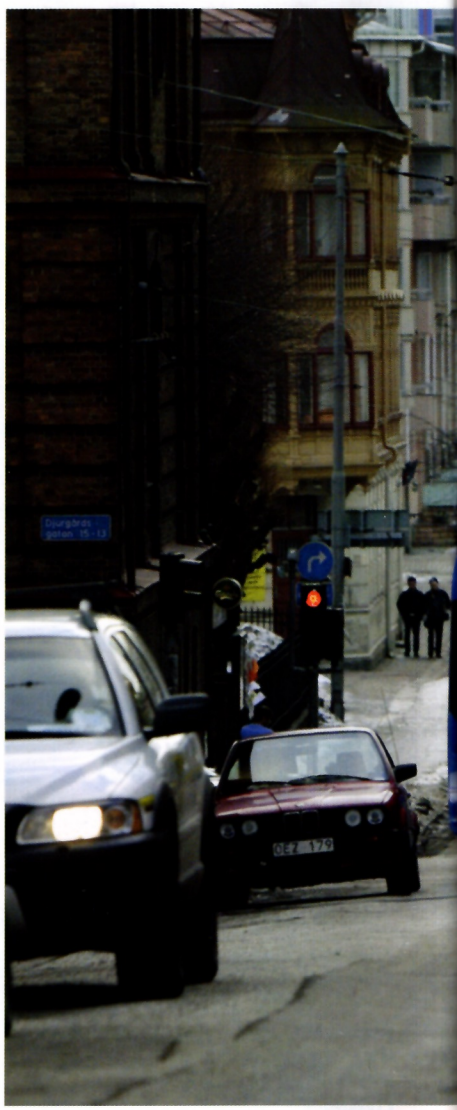
"We've got a good, young team at National Express and they deserve a chance to takeover. Some people go on too long, but I'm leaving while I can still do other things with my working life."

City press speculated that his departure will clear the way for the merger of NEG and First, believed to be most likely to escape monopolies issues because of their geographical divergence. Mr White and First chief executive Moir Lockhead are not seen as close allies.

Mr White dismissed the speculation: "Whenever there's talk of mergers, National Express comes into it," he told *CBW*.

A CPT spokesman told *CBW* that, if Mr White leaves the industry before the end of the year, his presidency will cease: "That will, in all probability, leave us finding an interim president for the remainder of the year."

Retiring NEG chief executive Phil White



CPT to meet with Kent Council

Kent County Council has agreed to meet with the CPT to discuss the row over new school contract conditions.

The operator group which has been formed to highlight what it says are unworkable aspects of the contracts has been supported by CPT operations executive John Burch and has retained former CPT man Brian Hirst to represent its views. Now, for the first time, it has got a hearing from the head of KCC's commercial services company, Kevin Harlock.

"It's great news," said one operator who did not want to be named. "It's just a pity that the meeting didn't take place when the council was drafting the contract."

CPT operations executive John Burch

In a further development, Mr Harlock, also managing director of KCC driver agency Kent Top Temps, is believed to be addressing a Kent commercial network operators' forum - which includes Arriva, Stagecoach and NuVenture - when it next meets.

One serious area of concern over the contract conditions is that they attempt to make the operator liable for all risks through their insurers. One insurance expert told *CBW*: "It's not actually possible to pass on legal liability in that way, so although those words may be in the contract, a court may see it differently."

The approach to the CPT came from Kent CC's passenger transport manager, Julia Seaward. But in further developments, it has now been announced that she is to take early retirement at the end of April, and it is believed the tendered bus services manager Mike Hodges is to be made redundant.

Mrs Seaward was on holiday when *CBW* called, and the council's press office could not confirm the two changes before *CBW* went to press.

Minister says 'yes' to coach forum

The coach industry will get a top-level meeting with ministers every year to air its views.

A meeting between transport minister Dr Stephen Ladyman and the CPT to talk about a 'minor' drivers' hours issue resulted in a surprise agreement between the Department for Transport and the industry to get more issues out in the open.

"The agreed annual meeting with the coach sector is a real achievement, and one that we have long wanted," said CPT operations director Steven Salmon. "All in all, this was a very good day's work."

Originally, the meeting between Dr Ladyman, Mr Salmon, MD of Lucketts Travel Ian Luckett, and MP for Fareham Mark Hoban was to discuss the requirement for drivers to carry 'historic'

A Volvo 7700 hybrid in Sweden

tachograph records. But Dr Ladyman took the opportunity to schedule a meeting to look at a broader range of drivers' hours issues, involving VOSA chief executive Stephen Tetlow and CPT DG Brian Nimick, and inaugurate an annual 'think tank' between the DfT and CPT coach sector.

"Dr Ladyman showed himself to be well-informed about the coach sector, and very sympathetic to operators' practical concerns," said Mr Salmon. "It is very important that we got the drivers' hours enforcement issues put firmly on the agenda for the meeting with VOSA."

■ The CPT and its Canadian equivalent, CUTA, have reached a formal agreement to exchange ideas.

The aim of Canadian Urban Transport Association is to promote public transport, and it sees the UK market as offering a useful counterpoint for the Canadian market. CPT and CUTA will exchange all membership newsletters and technical bulletins, places at annual PCV shows, offer access to each others' libraries and have a link between the websites of both organisations.

Volvo premieres 'heavy' hybrid

Volvo claims its new hybrid technology will offer fuel savings of up to 35%.

President and chief executive Leif Johansson said: "We envisage opportunities to accelerate developments in commercially-viable hybrids for heavy vehicles. This can be significant for both our customers and for the environment."

The new I-SAM hybrid engine technology, aimed at heavy vehicles, is said to provide maximum fuel-saving effects on routes with frequent braking and acceleration - suited to city bus traffic. The company says maintenance costs will also be significantly lowered through reduced wear on the braking system.

"There is a growing interest in the market to reduce fuel consumption," continues Mr Johansson. "This is driven by the uncertainty surrounding the physical and political availability of oil, and perhaps primarily, by climate change issues. Accordingly, many customers are seriously reviewing how they can contribute to reduce the dependency on oil. We now have a technology which opens a hybrid market for heavy vehicles."

The hybrid will be undergoing a lengthy period of evaluation prior to becoming available commercially.

Briefly

■ **Greater powers to enforce road laws on foreign lorry drivers will be extended to visiting coach drivers in the future says the DfT. Amendments to the reintroduced Road Safety Bill will allow police to clamp foreign drivers until a deposit on the likely fine is paid. Although not yet applying to foreign coach drivers, the move "gives us a platform to roll out to other vehicles in the future," a spokesman told *CBW*.**

■ **Karen Buck has definitely resigned says the DfT, responding to queries that it seemed like business as usual at the DfT last week, as Ms Buck chaired the CPT's Bus Partnership Forum. She tendered her resignation to the Secretary of State on March 3 as reported in *CBW* two weeks ago, and will leave sometime in the next two to three weeks. The department 'awaits news' on her successor along with the rest of us.**

■ **New Liberal Democrat leader Sir Menzies Campbell has appointed fellow Scottish MP, Alistair Carmichael, as his shadow transport secretary. Carmichael got stuck straight in to Labour transport minister Stephen Ladyman on his appointment, asking awkward questions in the House of Commons about the reduction in traffic police.**

■ **An overwhelming majority of *CBW* readers polled want to see all PSV work run on rebated fuel. The on-line poll at *www.cbwnet.co.uk* – which is still running – is showing that almost 74% of respondents believe that Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) should be extended to all operators, whether they run tour coaches or scheduled services.**

Veolia moves on Dunn-Line

French company makes offer for family firm

Andrew Peace, news editor

French transport giant Veolia has made a recommended offer for listed coach and bus operator Dunn-Line, through its UK subsidiary Veolia Transport UK.

The bid values the business at £9.7m, a 10.3% premium on the latest closing price before the bid was announced, and a 26.8% premium over the average value of the shares during the last 12 months. Shareholders have until March 29 to decide whether or not to accept the offer.

Veolia says the company will operate as a separate entity and that it will make minimal changes. The biggest change announced so far is that former chief executive Bob Dunn becomes a non-executive director, while his son Scott Dunn becomes managing director.

Veolia Transport UK chairman John O'Brien said: "We have been very impressed with the Dunn-Line business and believe it fits well with our overall strategy of building a high quality operation in the UK. I am delighted that both Bob and Scott Dunn will join our team. They bring with them a wealth of experience and will now help us with our further plans for growth."

Bob Dunn said: "While we have not sought an offer for the company, we nevertheless believe that the offer from Veolia represents a fair price and one that we recommend shareholders should accept.

"After much hard work, Dunn-Line is now a profitable and growing business, but it remains a small company and there are considerable internal and external risks attached to our achieving future growth as an independent business. Under the ownership and with the resources of Veolia, one of the world's largest transport operators, I believe that the company's future will be secure."

He says the company's opportunities for growth are restricted by the lack of suitable acquisitions in the market place, and any that are available are being "rapidly bought up by the larger national operators seeking to expand market share".

Veolia Transport has already secured 66.5% of the shares in Dunn-Line from undertakings by the Dunn-Line directors and other family members.

Based in Nottingham, Dunn-Line was founded in 1984 by Bob and Carol Dunn and operates a fleet of over 200 buses and coaches from several sites in the East Midlands, Hull and the North East. It was listed on AIM in 2004, and acquired Mass Transit in Lincoln and Alpha Travel in Hull in 2005.

Sneak peek at Dunn-Line's finances

A rare glimpse into the rising fortunes of the Dunn-Line Group comes with the publication of accounts for most of 2005. The group was listed on AIM in December 2004, but the transparency of its operations is about to vanish from the stock market, after the takeover by Veolia, and consequent de-listing.

Dunn-Line operates out of four main depots, in Nottingham, Durham, Lincoln and Hull. The group operates vehicles on a variety of work including local and school bus services, long distance services for NEG and providing buses and coaches for spot hire work.

In the past three years the strategy has been to move towards a predominantly contracted operation, with more bus services and contracted coach operations being taken on at the expense of traditional private hire work. The acquisition of MASS in Lincoln for £325k in May, was one step down this road and features in these accounts, but the subsequent acquisition of Alpha of Hull completed in January this year does not.

Results for the year ended November 30, 2005 show that group turnover increased nearly 18% from £11.741m to £13.096m largely due to the acquisition of the MASS operation in Lincoln which added £724,000 in income. Operating profits rose by 2% from £1.389m to £1.417m, with £129k coming from the acquisition, although the profit on continuing operations fell by

SUMMARY

Year ended Nov 30	2005 £m	2004 £m
Turnover		
Continuing operations	13.1	11.7
Acquisitions	0.7	–
Total	13.8	11.7
Operating profit		
Continuing operations	1.3	1.4
Acquisitions	0.1	–
Total	1.4	1.4
Profit on disposals	0.6	–
Pre-tax profit	1.5	0.7
Retained profit	1.1	0.5
Net assets	3.6	0.8

£12k. Exceptional items, which included legal fees in connection with the flotation, cost £89k.

The Group's pre-tax profits after exceptionals and finance costs was £1.459m compared with £735k a year ago, and after a smaller tax deduction, the retained profit for the year rose 113% from £497k to £1.06m.

Chief executive Bob Dunn said the acquired business provided additional value, creating further options for extending the client base. He said: "During the year the business has continued to improve operational efficiencies and provided growth during a period of uncertain fuel prices."

Firm's UK ambition

Veolia Transport UK will not rule out bidding for a major UK public transport operator in the future.

The company's stated aim is to become a significant player in the UK passenger transport industry, although it calls the question of it taking over any of the big five 'inappropriate' at this time, saying it wants to concentrate on building a reputation for running quality services.

Veolia Transport UK bought Welsh-based Bebb Travel in October, and made an offer for listed operator Dunn-Line last week. Its parent company, Veolia Environnement, recently announced a 60% rise in profits for 2005, to £430m.

When asked about Veolia's long term strategy in the UK, chairman John O'Brien, told *CBW*: "I'm expecting I'll develop a significant operation, and there are no upper boundaries for that - I'm not targeting two hundred, three hundred or 3,000 vehicles." Asked if that would include buying one of the big five operators, Mr O'Brien said: "That would be inappropriate to answer - my first job is to establish a reputation for being an excellent provider of public transport services, with businesses like the ones we have already taken over - with an established reputation for excellence of service."

Mr O'Brien describes the parent company as 'very supportive', saying that while he does not have access to unlimited funds, the company is ready to do "whatever I'm suggesting in the UK."

While big acquisitions may form part of Veolia Transport UK's future in this country, smaller acquisitions definitely will - Mr O'Brien says his company has already identified more targets, and will look at more if they satisfy his criteria of having an established quality reputation. But Veolia says it will grow organically too, and now that it has established operating bases it will start to tender for more work.

Meanwhile the takeover at Bebb Travel is apparently proceeding very smoothly. Mr O'Brien said: "We are delighted with how things are going. We couldn't be happier. I've bought exactly what I thought I was buying - a top quality company, with a top class management team that is doing exactly what it said it would do."

John O'Brien, chairman of Veolia Transport UK

Who are Veolia?

Veolia Transport UK is the transport arm of Veolia Environnement, a service conglomerate listed on the Euronext Paris and New York Stock Exchange, with a market capitalisation of €18.1bn. The group employs over 250,000 people worldwide and operates in 60 countries. 83% of its revenues are generated in Europe.

Veolia Transport UK was established in June 2004 as a wholly owned subsidiary of Veolia Transport Northern Europe AB – headquartered in Stockholm – a wholly owned subsidiary of Veolia Transport SA, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Veolia Environnement.

The company has traded in the UK previously as Connex, running train and bus services. Its Connex Bus company – which operated mainly in London – was acquired by National Express in 2004, leaving just a small subsidiary operating in Jersey.

The company lost its South Eastern rail franchise in 2003 for requiring too much subsidy.

It took its first steps back into the UK market last October when it acquired Bebb Travel, a privately owned bus and coach business based in Wales, with 80 employees and 40 buses and a turnover of around £5m.

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Driver attacked by teen yobs

But headteacher says violent incident is nothing to do with school

Andrew Peace, news editor

A school has denied any responsibility for a violent attack on a driver on board a school bus in Wales last week.

At 0830hrs last Tuesday morning (March 7), two teenage boys boarded a Silver Star Coaches school bus in Groeslon, near Caernarfon, and assaulted the driver, who suffered a dislocated shoulder and facial injuries.

The incident occurred three days after the driver had confronted one of the pair on one of the company's service buses. The boy was then attempting to board the vehicle and fight with other youths. The driver challenged the youth over the incident when he tried to board the school bus the following Tuesday, which sparked the attack.

The boys were both arrested and released on bail. The police and Gwynedd Council say they are both investigating the incident.

Silver Star Coaches boss Elfyn Thomas told *CBW*: "On a general basis the children who use our buses are very well behaved, but in 88 years in the game we have never ever experienced anything of this nature.

"This is a serious offence. We are taking the necessary steps to have the children banned from our coaches, and to make sure that this matter is dealt with properly."

He says the county council transport department is being very supportive, unlike the school's headmaster, who was quoted by the BBC as saying: "It is very, very unfortunate that this incident happened on a school bus and that the school has been dragged into this, as this incident is nothing to do with the school itself."

Dewi Jones, headmaster of Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle in Penygroes, would not speak directly to *CBW*, but through a third party says he stands by his comments to the BBC, and refers further enquiries to the council.

Another source at the school was happy to talk about the incident until *CBW* asked if the boys were still in school, when the source would make no further comment.

Calls to the council had not been returned as *CBW* went to press.

Bus and coach performance balances NatEx losses

Good performances in the UK coach and bus sectors cushioned the blow of losing UK rail work, and costly overseas disposals in National Express Group's (NEG) latest results, released last week.

Continuing and acquired businesses turned in an improved profit on a reduced turnover, as the group restructured its overseas operations in order to reduce its reliance on profits from UK rail franchising.

Although the headline acquisition of Spanish group Alsa for £273m, was the largest move made during 2005, other global moves were far more costly, and more than wiped out the whole bottom line. In a year of profound policy changes, NEG refocused its operations in North America, finally closed its Australian companies, and lost nearly £80m on writing off goodwill, essentially unable to recoup monies originally overpaid in the purchase price.

The sale of the ATC business in North America to Veolia, which was bringing in a margin of less than 4%, cost NEG £68.3m,

Coach passengers were up 2%

and the sale of Australian interests cost £7m, with the remaining business going into administration at the end of January. With franchise losses in the UK rail sector, and further losses due this year, NEG has resolved to concentrate on its incumbent franchises; and the acquisition of London operations from Tellings dampened its operating margin in the bus division. Nevertheless, the optimistic performance of Alsa, tender gains and purchases in the US school bus sector suggest that overseas business is now on track to make decent profit margins.

Results for the year ended December 31, 2005 show that group turnover dropped 5.8% from £2.35bn to £2.22bn largely due to the loss of some UK rail business, which still makes up nearly 68% (73% in 2004) of group turnover. Operating profits, after goodwill, etc, rose 9.6% from £99.9m to £109.5m, with more than half of it coming from UK operations.

The operating profit in the UK bus division, stayed level with the margin falling from 17.3% to 15.4%, largely through smaller margins in London, and the acquisition of TGM bus operations contributed only an operating profit of £800k on revenue of £12.4m. Coach operation produced an improved turnover and profit, with passenger numbers growing by 2%, and the margin rising from 9.9% to 10.7%.

Commenting on current trading, NEG chairman David Ross reported early successes in the US school bid season. He said: "We believe that Alsa will play a key role in the group's future growth prospects."

■ *CBW* meets Phil White, pages 18-21

SUMMARY

Year ended 31 Dec	2005 £m	2004 £m
Turnover	2,216.0	2,354.5
Total operating profit	109.5	99.9
Pre-tax profit	89.3	77.9
Retained profit	61.8	55.1
Discontinued operations	(65.5)	3.5
Net debt	563.4	136.6
DIVISIONAL RESULTS		
UK Bus		
Turnover	268.6	239.8
Operating profit	41.5	41.6
UK Coach		
Turnover	200.5	195.6
Operating profit	21.5	19.3
UK Rail		
Turnover	1497.2	1712.1
Operating profit	64.2	61.3
Europe ALSA		
Turnover	18.2	–
Operating profit	2.6	–
N American Bus		
Turnover	241.8	213.2
Operating profit	35.0	29.8
DISCONTINUED OPERATIONS		
N American Bus		
Turnover	100.8	152.1
Operating profit	3.8	7.1
Australia Bus		
Turnover	62.4	–
Operating profit	2.5	–
Inter-segment sales	(10.3)	(6.2)
Central costs	(9.3)	–

Adrian Mitchell, Go Ahead Brighton, and Jack Coupe, managing director of Coupe Construction

Brighton beautiful

Go-Ahead subsidiary the Brighton & Hove Bus Company has a smart new training and administrative headquarters building at its Lewes Road Bus Depot in Brighton.

The imaginative £1m project features a curved exterior wall and incorporates a range of vibrantly coloured windows on the front and side elevations. It was built by north-east based Coupe Construction and designed by London architects, Penson.

Neil Robinson, Go Ahead's project manager, commented: "Coupe Construction has done a tremendous job, working closely with our chosen architect, Penson.

"The building is very unusual in its design and has already attracted a lot of attention. It will be used extensively for training and administrative requirements, as part of our business expansion strategy within the south east region."

Last year's Bus Driver of the Year, Brent Humphries

Get your Bus Driver of the Year entries in

Entries to the 40th Bus Driver of the Year competition close on March 31.

Chairman of the UKBDoY Association Joe Mackie said: "We have come a long way since the first contest in Coventry in 1967, which led to the national event that has brought together the country's best bus drivers ever since."

The competition has a maximum of 120 spaces. Last year 115 drivers fought it out, with Brent Humphries from First Cymru eventually taking the title.

The competition will be held in Blackpool on September 9 and 10. Operators wanting to find out more should contact Jack Raine, the competition secretary, on 0161 427 5986, or go to *www.bdoy.co.uk*

World

An American man was arrested and kept in custody for seven months after allegedly trying to bribe Dominican Republic officials over a £30 million-plus contract to purchase over 1,000 Hyundai trucks and buses. The man was to have been the first US citizen to be extradited to the Republic until the judge reversed his decision citing 'fraud or misrepresentation' on the extradition papers. Officials from the current administration are alleged to have altered the papers in an attempt to smear the previous government.

Volkswagen has announced plans for a bus and truck plant in South Africa, in partnership with local constructor Mzantsi Truck and Bus – a new company set up by ex-employees of VW's car assembly plant in Port Elizabeth. The plant is already under construction, with bus production (around 200 per year) expected to start in the third quarter of 2006. All vehicles will be in right hand drive.

Chinese home-built bus, coach and chassis production declined by 1.72% to 267,074 units in 2005, according to government figures. Medium sized petrol-powered buses were down 75%, while alternative-fuel large buses gained 64%. Large diesel buses grew by 17%. The light petrol chassis market leapt 192%.

Following Volvo's pull-out in December, US bus builder Bluebird has announced a $50 million (£29 million) debt-for-equity refinancing plan. The plan will see the company's general unsecured creditors fully compensated.

Daewoo Bus Corporation has received a two-year tax exemption, and a 50% tax cut for the next five years, for setting up a factory in Vietnam. The new company, Viet Nam Daewoo Bus, has been granted a 50 year licence, permitting an investment of £29 million.

Briefly

Travel Coventry is reviewing bus services in the city to coincide with the reopening of the Pool Meadow bus station. Twenty of the firm's 90 routes will be changed to take in new developments like the Ricoh Arena football ground. The firm says the move is not designed to cut costs. The new station opens on April 2.

Plymouth Citybus will spend over £300,000 installing CCTV on 125 of its 167 vehicles. The company says it spends up to £100,000 a year on replacing bus windows alone, and that six or seven drivers are assaulted annually. In the past three months nearly two dozen buses have been taken off the roads. Single deckers will get six cameras, deckers will get eight.

Operators in Walsall in the West Midlands are set to benefit from a £16.62m package of transport improvements aimed at improving bus services, announced by the government last week. The new measures will remove through traffic from the town centre by increasing capacity on the ring road.

More than 2,000 people have signed a *Gloucester Citizen* petition calling for free Concessionary Travel throughout the county – currently only pensioners outside the city will be entitled to free countywide travel. The council leader will appeal to the government for extra funds. Stagecoach is complaining that its drivers will take the flak from customers confused over their entitlement.

The Road Operator's Safety Council (ROSCO) has published a good practice guide to help prevent bridge bashing. The guide describes the consequences and risks of bridge strikes and gives advice on how such incidents can be prevented. It has been drawn up with input from its industry partners like the CPT, TfL, DfT and Arriva. To order copies, email *rcory@golleyslater.co.uk*

Residents' anger at Arsenal coach parking

Council says supporters coaches can park on streets outside new stadium

Andrew Peace

Islington Borough Council has gone against strong local feeling by allowing Arsenal Football Club to park fans' coaches in the area surrounding its new stadium. Council bosses say they are prepared to ride the protests out.

The planning application for the £400m Emirates Stadium originally included a 40-space coach park directly underneath the stadium, but after the terrorist attacks last July, Police decided that was too much of a security risk. Instead, the Club decided to park coaches on the roads around the stadium - causing a huge row with residents before Christmas.

As an alternative, Arsenal bosses proposed parking the coaches on a sports centre car park and nearby industrial estate, but residents were still not happy. One was quoted as saying: "Arsenal should be made to have the coaches on their own site instead of dumping them on us."

The problem is caused by the fact that the stadium is built on a small plot of land compared to most other football clubs. Council documents say Arsenal is required to provide at least 40 coach parking spaces either within the stadium or in the surrounding area, and that the club would need council approval for transport arrangements before events are allowed to take place.

Residents staged a formal protest at a council planning meeting held last Thursday, when councillors voted to accept the football club's plan, with just a few amendments.

Islington Council leader Steve Hitchins - who is not a member of the planning committee - told *CBW*: "The issue was always about where, not if, coaches are going to be parked at the stadium. Local people are very upset about it, they see it as the council rolling over for Arsenal. Inevitably the protestors will outnumber the people in favour by a large number - we are just going to have to ride it out."

Coaches will now be permitted to park at the Sobell Sports Centre on Hornsey Street, another plot on Drayton Park, and on industrial land at Queensland Road during matches. But councillors say Queensland Road should take precedence over the others, and eventually should become a permanent coach park. The council further stipulated that these arrangements should last for just one season, and that coaches should vacate the sites within one hour of a match finishing.

Duncan impressed by Metroline

Alan Duncan, shadow secretary of state for Trade and Industry, visited London bus operator Metroline last week to see the company's innovative training arrangements for himself.

The visit started with the 'Learning Bus', which moves around eight garages providing computer skills teaching and library facilities and was developed to overcome the problems of staff accessing resources when they work in a variety of locations, often at irregular hours. Since it was launched in 2003, the Learning Bus has helped over 1,000 employees to access accredited I.T. and language qualifications.

Mr Duncan said: "I was really impressed. In-house learning like this does so much good. It is fabulous to see everyone working together to help anyone who wants to improve their skills get the opportunity to do so."

The Learning Bus's success lead to the establishment of three fixed learning centres in Metroline garages. Mr Duncan also visited the most recently opened, at Metroline's Holloway Garage. The initiative is supported by Learn Direct, TUC, T&GWU, CoNEL, DfES and TfL.

Alan Duncan MP meets staff at Metroline

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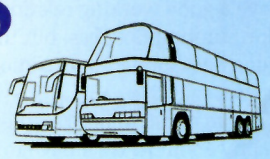

Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at *andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk*

IRELAND

Transport Minister Martin Cullen has announced an extension of free bus travel for Old Age Pensioners, with the promise of a further review of the scheme hours in 2007.

Currently some 200,000 OAPs per week avail of the free travel on the **Dublin Bus** services alone.

Under the new rules from March 13, OAPs can travel free on both Dublin Bus and **Bus Éireann** from 9am to 4.30pm, whereas previously they were only eligible to travel free from 9.45am. Many independent bus operators around the country also honour bus passes issued under the scheme.

Making the announcement, Minister Cullen said: "This move reflects the active lives of our pensioners. The bus is a critical part of their daily lives, in Dublin and across the country.

"Many pensioners are still in full or part time employment with the bus being the way to and from work. Similarly, an extension in free travel time makes life easier - be it for accessing services, medical appointments, visiting family and friends or shopping.

"Since 2000, we made a commitment to ensure that every new bus purchased was a lowfloor bus, thereby ensuring accessibility for all. At present, Dublin Bus has over 50% of its fleet lowfloor, with 45% of routes now designated fully accessible. Similar improvements are being made in Bus Éireann," he said.

Minister Cullen also signalled that the government was prepared to look at extending free bus travel times, particularly in the evening, next year.

NORTH

Northumbria County Council says it regrets the way its controversial application for Kickstart funding with **Arriva** was handled last year.

John Hodgson, network development officer for Northumbria Council told *CBW*: "I am unhappy that Northumbria Coaches spent money building up a service, and that it has not worked out for them. We used to have a good working relationship with Northumbria Coaches, but this whole thing has clouded our relationship with them.

"I can understand why they are not happy about it. We'll have to keep working and hopefully we'll get the relationship back."

The DfT told *CBW* that it was up to local councils to seek out local operators appropriate for the grant. Mr Smith however says he was unaware that the grant existed until he saw in the local paper that Arriva had won the money, and was using it to compete against him. Mr Hodgson says the council employee responsible for the Kickstart applications had since left the council and he could not say why this person had not informed all local operators, although he said the council had held public meetings and did not keep the grant "secret". He said Arriva had approached the council in the first place and that, once the application had been made, the Council was bound by commercial confidentiality.

Mr Hodgson says: "It put us in a strange position. We weren't in a position a county council would like to be in."

But, he says, as soon as he became aware that Northumbria had registered a commercial service on the same route, he informed the DfT of the conflict. The DfT considered the case, and an appeal from Mr Smith, but eventually decided that the grant award should stand.

Mr Hodgson says: "He says that if the process was run again that he would write to all local operators to make sure they were informed."

The final irony in the case is that Arriva's route, originally scheduled to start in April, will not now start until July; the infrastructure changes that were part of the bid will be paid for out of the council's 2006/07 budget - another fact that Mr Smith was unaware of, and which would have allowed him an extra four months on the route. He says: "It's too little, too late, typical. But there's no point being upset, I've had my say now - we are concentrating on our other services."

EAST

Stagecoach in Cambridge's Park and Read service is now up and running. For two weeks, passengers will be able to read specially-written books by authors such as Ruth Rendell and Joanna Trollope, stored in book racks on board.

Two 'desert storm' buses have been specially liveried to promote the service, and were used by the authors to travel from the BBC to a reception on the Embankment, attended by Tony Blair, to promote World Book Day.

Briefly

Stagecoach in the South Downs will put an extra 10 buses on services from April 3 to cope with the expected demand for Concessionary Travel. West Sussex county council has provided free travel countywide from 9am.

WALES

The first **Welsh Bus and Coach Show**, starring around 80 new and classic vehicles, will be held in Swansea on the weekend of June 17 and 18.

Part of the 11th National Transport Festival of Wales, which will have over 500 vehicles on display, the free event is supported by First Cymru and will feature buses and coaches from operators like Silver Star Coaches and Edwards of Pontypridd, as well as English operators like Plymouth City Bus and Metrobus in Crawley.

Organiser Ashley Lovering told *CBW*: "More and more buses and coaches were coming along to the Festival every year so in the end we decided to

Stagecoach in Cambridge's Park and Read service offers passengers books by Ruth Rendell and Joanna Trollope

Southampton Unilink's Myllenium. Below: Buzzlines sponsors Joao Charlesworth

Briefly

A Norwich MP has called on the council to stop spending money on special needs transport, and spend the money saved on educating the children in local schools instead. Norfolk County Council spends £3.2m/ year on special needs transport. Twenty per cent of Norfolk's 113,000 children are identified as having special or additional educational needs, although only 3.4% of them have statements of SEN. Over 90 children have to be educated outside the county, including one who is taxied to and from Kent each week.

give them their own section!"

The first day is the 'Under Milk Wood' Classic Vehicles Road Run, a 40-mile run from Swansea to Laugharne, which is also free to enter. The Sunday is a static event held in Brynmill, Swansea. Gemini Travel will be running free buses to and from the site. Festival goers can get a discounted rate at the Ramada Encore Swansea Bay, for £59.95 B&B. For more details about the show, see *www.freewebs.com/ntfwswansea*

This date is now firmly inscribed in *CBW*'s diary - see you there!

SOUTH EAST

After four years of charging a £1 flat fare, **Southampton Unilink**, the university bus service operated by **Minerva Accord**, is to raise its cash fares to £1.20. All other fares remain the same. George Fair, operations manager, says: "While any increase is unwelcome, I am confident that the new flat fare represents excellent value. Everyone can see that the revenue is being put to good use, for example, with the investment in new, fully accessible, low-emission buses. A quality service does not come cheaply, and we are not spared the increases in fuel and staff costs that all transport operators face."

The firm has recently bought two new East Lancs Myllenium B29D-bodied 10.5m ADL Dart SLFs, with 4-cylinder 3.9 litre Cummins engines, for use on its free shuttle route, in addition to a Scania decker.

The Unilink has been in existence

for four years and, according to John Waugh, the University's transport manager, growth has never been less than 24% per annum.

Buzzlines is, literally, adding to its stable of sports sponsorships. In addition to the Folkestone Invicta football team - who play in the Buzzlines Stadium and wear the Buzzlines logo on their team kit - and the Buzzlines Equestrian Team which competes in the South East, the company is now supporting Joao Charlesworth, a champion show jumper, and his partner Scarlett Stevens.

The company has registered five horse names with the British Show Jumping Association (BSJA). Six-year-old Buzzlines Tornado recently won two regional competitions, and seven year-old Buzzlines Luck Money placed second out of 70 competitors in another competition. The sponsorship will also help Charlesworth and Stevens bring on their stable of 16 horses.

Roadworks

M74 Hamilton
Until May 12: Roadworks and contraflow both ways at J5 A725 (Raith Interchange)

M8 Renfrewshire
Until May 10: Delays expected and slip road onto motorway closed on M8 Eastbound at J28 (Glasgow Airport)

M6 Cheshire
Between 2100 and 0500hrs until March 31: Entry slip road closed during the night on M6 Southbound at J21A M62 (Croft Interchange)

M55 Lancashire
Until March 31: One lane closed both ways between J3 A585 (Kirkham) and J1 A6 / B6241 (Fulwood)

M1 Derbyshire
Between 2100hrs and 0600hrs until April 8: Exit slip road closed northbound at J29 A617 / A6175 (Chesterfield / Mansfield)

A40 Gloucestershire
Saturdays and Sundays until March 19: Road closed on A40 both ways between Huntley and Birdwood

M4 South Wales
Until April 13: Speed restriction of 50 mph eastbound between J40 A4107 (Port Talbot) and J39 A48 (Margam On Slip)

A1(M) Hertfordshire
Between 2000 and 0600hrs until June 14: Two lanes closed and speed restriction of 50 mph both ways between J6 A1000 / B656 / (Welwyn / Welwyn Garden City) and J7 A602 (Stevenage)

M5 North Somerset
Until July 31: Speed restriction both ways between J19 A369 (Portishead) and J20 B3133 (Clevedon)

A39 Somerset
Until May 21: Road closed between B3135 and A37

A38 Devon
Until March 24: Speed restriction of 40mph both ways between Drybridge and Lower Dean junction

In association with
trafficlink
www.trafficlink.co.uk

Ageism regulation published

Trade and Industry Secretary finalises rules on discrimination based on age

The final measures to outlaw age discrimination in the workplace have been published by Trade and Industry Secretary Alan Johnson.

Age discrimination is the most frequently cited form of discrimination by employees. The regulations will provide important new rights and responsibilities for every employee and business in Britain.

Mr Johnson said: "Ageism will affect more people, at some stage in their lives, than any other form of discrimination. But until now the law of the land has allowed it to continue.

"With these new regulations it will become illegal for workers to miss out on recruitment, promotion or training because of prejudice about their age"

The regulations (which will not affect the age at which people can claim their state pension) will:

- ban age discrimination in terms of recruitment, promotion and training
- ban unjustified retirement ages of below 65
- remove the current age limit for unfair dismissal and redundancy rights.

They will also introduce:

- a right for employees to request working beyond retirement age and a duty on employers to consider that request
- a new requirement for employers to give at least six months notice to employees about their intended retirement date so that individuals can plan better for retirement, and be confident that "retirement" is not being used as cover for unfair dismissal.

- A copy of the final regulations will be available on the Stationary Office website. Meantime a draft version can be found on the DTI website at *www.dti.gsi.gov.uk/er/equality/age.htm.* The analysis of responses to the Coming Of Age Consultation is also available from the age page of the DTI website.

CORRECTION:
Last week's Money Matters ('Don't get your fingers burnt') contained an incorrect date for the implementation of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Regulations. The date given, April 1, 2006, was correct at the time of writing and, indeed, still correct according to the legislation on the appropriate government website that can be viewed today. However, the government felt that businesses didn't have enough time to prepare for the changes and so pushed the implementation date back to October 1, 2006.

We apologise for any confusion caused.

Another family-friendly law is on its way

Six months off for new dads?

The DTi is consulting on a new law that would give either parent of newborn children the right to take up to six months off work to look after them. The additional paternity leave would only be available to fathers if the mother has chosen to go back to work, and both parents would not be entitled to leave at the same time. The consultation document is at *www.dti.gov.uk/workandfamilies.htm.*

The government wants to introduce the measure before the end of this parliament, at the same time as it extends maternity pay to 12 months.

The consultation centres around four key points:

- eligibility criteria, i.e. length of service, six months, one year, five years
- the earliest point when the leave could be taken, the consultation says 20 weeks from the birth of the child
- rights and terms and conditions whilst on additional paternity leave - should the father's rights be the same as the mothers?
- details of how the scheme would operate in practise, including a suggested eight week notice period

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The NatEx kiosks are available 24 hours a day

Help yourself with NatEx

National Express has introduced self service ticket kiosks at Heathrow and Gatwick airports, Birmingham's Digbeth Coach Station and Manchester Central Coach Station, helping to cut down ticket queues at busy times.

The kiosks will be available to use 24 hours a day and will print out extensive timetable and fare information for customers to keep and refer to. The kiosk is integrated into the National Express corporate booking systems and will be rolled-out to key National Express locations.

The units were designed by Key Technology Solutions and are able to both email and text key personnel to inform them of various states e.g. printer roll low. A short trial period showed the kiosks are outperforming all expectations.

Cannabis driver loses compensation claim

Coventry man claims unfair dismissal after drugs fine

A Coventry coach driver has lost his compensation claim for unfair dismissal after being fined £250 for having cannabis near his driving seat while bringing school children back from a trip to Europe.

Cannabis worth £128,000 was also found in luggage in the Harry Shaw coach by customs at Dover and the vehicle was impounded, a Birmingham tribunal was told.

Coach driver Mr Martin Seal was arrested and charged with attempting to smuggle cannabis into this country and possessing cannabis resin. But the attempted smuggling charge was later dropped and Mr Seal was eventually fined £250 with £250 costs at Canterbury Crown Court for possessing cannabis resin.

The details were revealed as Mr Seal claimed compensation for unfair dismissal against Harry Shaw Coach Cruiser of Coventry.

Mr Seal said he had been employed by the firm since 1999 and had a good record until the cannabis incident.

He said he believed he had been unfairly dismissed by Harry Shaw because he only had a small amount of cannabis near him to help ease the pain of a trapped nerve.

Customs had searched the coach as a safety measure because it was on the day following the terrorist attack in London in July last year. Mr Seal complained he had not been allowed to contest his dismissal.

Mr Seal also alleged that Customs and Excise had put pressure on the firm to sack him.

Mrs Victoria Donajgrodska, representing Harry Shaw, admitted the firm had not carried out the disciplinary and dismissal procedure in the correct manner but said that there were special circumstances.

Warwickshire County Council, for whom Harry Shaw does a lot of work, had told the firm not to allow Mr Seal to drive school children in view of his conviction.

The firm also needed to retain its fine reputation among customers, she said, adding: "We needed to act quickly in the interests of the community and the contractual position."

Tribunal chairman Mr David Dimbylow said that overall the firm had acted in a reasonable manner and Mr Seal's claim for compensation for unfair dismissal was rejected.

The firm was said to have an annual turnover of £4.5m.

Events

March 18: South West CPT Dinner Dance, Langstone Cliff Hotel, Dawlish Warren, Devon. CPT members only. 01364 661365

March 23: North West Bus Summit, The Centre, Birchwood Park, Warrington. *www.nwda.co.uk*, or call Nigel Featham, 01925 634296

April 4: London Transport Awards Dinner, London Hilton. 01224 263134

April 5: Getting Active, Getting There – making the links between transport and health. Conference. Bull Hotel, Peterborough. *conferences@landor.co.uk*, 0845 270 7965

April 6-7: 30th UK Transport Conference and Exhibition: 'Wasted Miles, Wasted Money'. University of Nottingham. 01223 881622 or *annchapman@CICC-conferences.org.uk*

April 7-9: Coach Tourism Council/ Bonded Coach Holidays Conference 2006, Llandudno, North Wales. 0870 850 2839 or email *admin@coachtourismcouncil.co.uk*

April 22-23: UK Coach Rally, Brighton, 01753 631170

April 24-26: CPT Scotland Annual Conference, Gleneagles. Gail Hume 0131 272 2150, email: *gailhume@cpt-uk.freeserve.co.uk*

April 25/27: CV Show, NEC, Birmingham. *www.cvshow.com*

May 4: Employee Motivation and Incentives, conference, CBI Conference Centre, London. *www.symposium-events.co.uk*

May 8-10: ALBUM Conference, Cardiff. Karen Stafford-Smith 029 2078 7700.

May 9-13: Motortec automotive show, IFEMA, Madrid, Spain. *www.motorteconline.com*, +34 91 722 3000

By Sue Reynolds

That don't impress me much

Make, model and age just do not matter, a coach without a driver is just a pile of rusting metal.

God knows there have been times when a gorilla walking through the door with a PCV licence would have been employed before you could say 'banana'. And a coach with that type of driver is a liability.

It is spring again and time to get more coach drivers to join our team. And what do we expect of a coach driver?

Professionalism, tour management, entertainment, guiding, caring, navigating, negotiating, diplomacy and the ability to safely manoeuvre a large coach around some very tricky small spaces and then clean it at the end of a very long day.

If you fit the bill, give me a call. Here's a few interview tips I have gleaned from previous encounters.

1 **Know your phone number.** It really is a waste of everyone's time if you ring during the evening and leave a message on the answer machine giving the wrong contact details. If I can't find you, I can't hire you.

2 **Tell me about your other interviews.** It really impresses me to know that you have just finished an interview with A's Travel, down the road, and can I hurry up because you are due at B's Coaches in 10 minutes.

3 **Give me the lowdown on your previous employers.** I really want to know that you are working for a f****** w***** and that you have worked more than 20 consecutive 18-hour days because they don't believe in tachos. I just know that when you next move you will be saying the same about me, because it sounds so impressive.

4 **Tell me about your hobbies.** I like to support my local football team and am delighted to know that you do too. And that you have to have every Saturday off to watch them play, you must finish by 4pm when they have home evening matches and have the day off when the evening matches are away. Also your schedule must be written with due regard to the championship in general and the World Cup.

5 **Lets talk about wages.** You are great and I am sure you will fit in well, but the rate of pay is the same for everyone. I'm not going to offer you a special deal, safe in the knowledge that you will not tell anyone. I pay by PAYE therefore I cannot hide your employment from the child support agency and I cannot pay you under a fictitious name. Furthermore I do not believe that you alone have a special arrangement with HM Revenue and Customs who accept that you are self employed.

Sue Reynolds is a director of Reynolds Diplomat. If you'd like to follow in her footsteps and have your say in Open Platform, email *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to Open Platform, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

6 **On the test drive.** It is not a good idea to crash the coach especially when you have already been told to take that corner wide because the barrier is close to the road.

7 **Tell me what you do well.** 'I am a tour driver, I only do tours I do not do school work - I hate children'. That will get you the job every time.

8 **Coaches.** You are so good that you never drive anything more than two years old and it is not your job to keep it clean. Great, let's start as you mean to carry on.

9 **References.** A fellow operator rang the other day. He was being taken to an industrial tribunal by a driver, who had done the most atrocious things, but due to a technicality had the law on his side. Had he been like this with us? Never hesitate to ring me for a reference, I will be only too happy to tell you the truth... just don't ask me to do it in writing.

10 **Be a family man/woman.** Did I tell you about the one who had to start after nine and finish by three to take his kids to and from school? What he forgot to mention is that he took them, and loads of their friends, in a coach belonging to the opposition.

I bet you can name a few of these choice characters. Just remember that once you have employed them the law now makes it very difficult to get rid of them. I make them fill in an application form, I don't really care what they put on it. I am just safe in the knowledge that a cast iron reason for dismissal is to have lied on the application form.

A colleague likes to ask the following question 'What made you select this company as the one for which you really want to work?' Anyone who can give a good answer to that question gets the job - even if they have failed on all the other criteria.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...

The lowdown with Brown

Senior traffic commissioner Philip Brown tells *CBW* about his battles with endless red tape and why a public inquiry 'is not a meeting for a coffee and a chat'

Send your letters to *cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk*, fax 0845 2802927 or write to:
Inbox, CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8FD

LETTER OF THE WEEK

I would like to respond to the letter from Richard Matthews (*CBW*, March 1) which suggests that it is more important for taxis to receive BSOG than coaches.

My argument for extending BSOG to coaches was on the basis that we provide mass transport in much the same way that trains, buses and planes do. The only difference being that unlike these forms of mass transport we do not receive a penny of our fuel tax back from the government. This not only creates unfair competition for our industry, it goes against the government's much-lauded desire to get as many cars off the road as possible. The argument for taxis having BSOG is not as compelling, as, at best, it can only replace one car journey with another.

Andrew Richmond MD, Epsom Coaches Group

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.

CORGI

Tax hassles with new midicoach

As a warning to other operators, we purchased a midicoach with a cherished number plate in May 2005, on the basis that the last owner retained the number plate when they purchased another vehicle.

The vehicle had two months road tax and a full MoT. When the road tax ran out in July we phoned the dealer we purchased it from and they told us to send the MoT to the last owner, who sent us six months road tax.

In January 2006, we wrote to the last owner about the log book, changeover and road tax, which was due to expire at the end of the month. Since then we have written to them twice more and phoned four times but the person we need to talk to is never available.

We phoned the dealer to see if they could help, but to no avail.

The DVLA V62 form will take up to six weeks to investigate, so now we have a coach parked up without tax. Be warned: do not buy without a log book.

TH Seagrave
Bulwell Travel, Nottingham

Spotted

Tom McReynolds sent us this snap of an ex-driver training vehicle now plying its trade as a snack bar in Martinique in the Caribbean. Send your snaps to the address above.

UK Travel Solutions strikes again...

I know you've had postbags full of letters about this lot. We gave plenty of quotes to UK Travel Solutions (*CBW*, February 9), but after they were told we would need payment 10 working days in advance, they didn't book anything with us, surprise surprise.

Di Millman
Millmans Coaches Ltd

Friends reunited – thanks to CBW

I read the letter from Ray Pearson (Looking for an old forces friend, Inbox, March 1) and I have passed the information on to Pete Humber. I have worked in the bus industry with Pete, on and off, for nearly 40 years.

Ashley Taylor
email

Time for miles to hit the road

Re miles v kilometres (*CBW*, March 1): Kilometres please. Difficult to believe that in 2006 we are using some of these odd old things.

David Philpot
email

5 YEARS AGO **Arriva Passenger Services increased operating profit by 10% to £81 million. Total turnover, including rail, was £1.7 billion.**

10 YEARS AGO **Dunn-Line bought Lamcote International of Radcliffe on Trent as it aimed to become the largest coach operator in Nottinghamshire.**

20 YEARS AGO **Shamrock and Rambler Coaches, of Bournemouth, took delivery of three new double-decker coaches for a non-stop daily service to London. A day return cost £8.25.**

March 15 in history:
44 BC: Gaius Julius Caesar, dictator of Rome, is stabbed to death in the Roman Senate house by 60 conspirators led by Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus
1906 Rolls Royce is born
1917 Czar Nicholas II abdicates

Googled...

www.ebay.co.uk

A search for 'bus' on ebay's UK site turns up 70-odd results in the commercial vehicles section. Among the souvenir Routemaster signs and spare seats for a Renault Master you can find the odd bargain, or, sometimes just the odd. But if you've got £45,000 burning a hole in your pocket, this 2004 BMC 60-seat school bus could be for you – providing you can get to Kilmarnock to pick it up.

Meet... Phil White

Just days before he announced his retirement, Phil White, chief executive of National Express Group and president of the Confederation of Passenger Transport, explained the lie of the land to Mark Williams

In recent years, the Confederation of Passenger Transport has made a wholesome habit of picking presidents with a real passion for the industry.

The 'safe' choice is the president who is a model of political correctness, deeply diplomatic about what's said in public and private. The presidents your members really like, though, are people with real heart.

Steve Telling and Steve Clayton continued the CPT trend. But in Phil White, chief executive of the National Express Group, the CPT has excelled itself. White has a great mind, and has no hesitation in speaking it. Now, we learn, he has fewer opportunities to give us the benefit of his wisdom.

When I meet with him at the NEG headquarters just off Oxford Street, he is keeping the fact that he's to retire this year under his hat, saving the announcement for two days later when burgeoning annual results are revealed.

> Democracy is fine, but it is not necessarily the most efficient way of getting things done

Nursing the Big Secret, he looks relaxed as he greets me, his top button undone and a warm smile on his face. We settle down with a coffee. What, I ask, does the political landscape look like from where he's sitting?

"A few years ago, transport wasn't even on the political agenda. Now, the priorities are health, education and transport," he says. "We have started changing the relationship with local authorities. But good schemes have been blighted by the political debate. We should all aim at one thing; the passenger."

"It's not the national government; they don't want the bad relationships. And look at the shire counties - they are dynamic. Basil Jackson at Cambridgeshire - he looks less at the price and more at the value of contracts, and there are others like him."

Over the four years of his tenure, Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling MP has made some friends, and White's among them: "Darling's desire is to sort things out. He had a pretty tricky job on the rail side, but his performance was good.

"He's been very supportive of operators, but he expects the industry to deliver. There's no doubt he wants to pursue the line of stiffened Quality Bus Partnerships rather than return to a regulated system.

"The fact that he's been there for four years has brought some stability to the situation. He seems very pragmatic and considered in his approach to public transport. Road pricing won't be an easy sell for him..."

Mr Darling's predecessors - including the Deputy Prime Minister - seemed keen to throw some cash at service subsidy but did it work, I ask him: "It's so important to innovate," he says. "Most of our competition as bus operators comes from the car, and to combat that in many cases requires a lot of innovation.

"We have to accept that not all experiments work. But Brian King, MD of Trent Barton, Blazefield chairman Giles Fearnley, and others prove that they can. Local authorities will back a good scheme, but it's not just about the money, it's about encouragement.

"The problem is that they tend to think about the quality of the things on the road, but they should look more closely at road infrastructure. Capital grants for buses don't achieve anything. Look at the success of guided busway where it's gone in... it can be very successful."

White says he accepts that everyone is a stakeholder in any major changes in road priority, but voter power can introduce politics where policy is actually more important: "Democracy is fine, but it is not necessarily the most efficient way of getting things done," he says.

Getting some financial support into the system is important, he says, and that goes for coaching,

> Nothing will be resolved if coach operators don't get involved with their trade association

> Good schemes have been blighted by the political debate

too. White spent a few minutes extolling the expertise of erstwhile National Express Coaches MD Denis Wormwell, but said that progress meant involving the broader industry.

"A lot has been achieved with scheduled coaching. We've modernised and rebranded, and we've latterly had government support," he said, revealing that, as a quid pro quo for introducing half fares for concessionary travel - increasingly relevant given the massive investment in wheelchair accessible coaches going on now.

"So we now get fuel duty rebate and the 50km limit has gone. The reduced cost has been given back to the passenger. If you look at the coach market, the government should recognise that it's pretty much self-sufficient. It's almost all commercial operation.

"The smaller operators on the leisure side are a real Cinderella industry, but many are small, family-run companies, and they are teetering on a knife edge. They are too small to attract funding and deals, and are struggling with the cost burden of legislation.

"But those operators mean a lot to the public, and offer a lot. For ourselves, I can say our contracted operators are very much part of the National Express family. We have got to find some way of supporting them."

White then mentally pops on his CPT hat for a moment, and fixes me with a stare: "You know, the CPT has done a lot for coach operators behind the scenes. At the moment, it's doing an audit of the burden of recent legislation to back a case for cutting out the bureaucracy. CPT has a role for the smaller operator.

"Actually, the market competes very aggressively, but it has to come together to win more battles. I think this needs a lot more from the CPT on members benefits, because members have to get value for money. But nothing will be resolved if coach operators don't get involved with their trade association."

But he is concerned that all in coach operation is not rosy, including the minority of 'rogues' who damage the image of coach travel. But White is not convinced all is being done to enforce the rules that could be done.

"I understand that the traffic areas are under-resourced, but there has got to be something wrong when phoenix operators can get back into the loop," he says. "I really cannot see how rogue operators get through the system - the same names appear again and again.

"It seems to me that the traffic areas have got to look behind the businesses, not concentrate on the roads and buses."

And we move on to the subject of the National Express Group itself, delivering good results for shareholders with a range of businesses. I start by asking about its North American bus operations, rationalised by the sale of ATC to Connex. It looks as if the subsequent acquisition in Canada

Dennis Wormwell. Left: The instantly recognisable NatEx livery. Above right: NatEx has taken over Spanish coaching giant Alsa

"Metro has been very dynamic in its thinking, and I think Sheena Pickersgill deserves credit"

Alsa is express coaching with golf bags and Blackberrys

of Northstar and its integration with Stock Transportation signals that NEG believes school buses are where it's at, I suggest.

"Yes, but the customer in North America is different - it's the school board. For them, safety and quality are the central issues and transport is all part of the same school budget.

"Stock Transportation offers a 'basket' of quality, with good vehicles, well-trained staff and efficient services. The board simply doesn't want hassle off parents. I asked one board what it expected from us: 'If you are doing your job well, the phone doesn't ring'."

White agrees the market's very different in the UK, with vehicles which - though archaic and, let's face it, ugly - can't be used outside of the school run: "The distances aren't long and the buses don't transfer to the leisure market. But they are safe. " I say I'm worried that the experience might put potential bus passenger off: "I don't think there are seen as public transport, they are seen as school buses."

He has a final word to say on the Metro - West Yorkshire PTE - My Bus project, which has seen it buying its own BMC buses and operating them with dedicated staff, trained with children: "Metro has been very dynamic in its thinking, and I think Sheena Pickersgill deserves credit for driving the project forward."

On the express coaching side, there has been some serious development. The acquisition of Spanish operator Alsa - 200 years old and running 1,400 express vehicles. And that coming on top of NEG's multi-million-pound developments of both the operating process of NatEx coaching and two interchanges. The final version of Digbeth Coach Station will have set the group back an eight-figure sum. Worth it, I ask?

"The development costs in the coach market are chicken feed compared to rail development," he says. Looking forward, he has ex-Megabus co-architect Paul Bunting in charge - releasing Denis Wormwell to work some magic on the bus side - and sees Alsa as another blend of ideas to add to the stock of the coach division.

"I'm looking forward to the exchange of ideas with Alsa," he says. The Cosmen family who owned Alsa have joined the board and White sees what they have achieved in Spain.

He admits that, in a regulated environment, it isn't a direct swap for the UK market, but within the confines of the system Alsa has built an incredibly innovative and well-structured business: "It's express coaching with golf bags and Blackberrys," White says.

He knows this because, as an experiment, he caught Alsa's Supra deluxe coach service unannounced: "I'm not joking. There were businessmen on there. The key is the best coaches, nice drivers, excellent couriers and good catering.

"Alsa gets the routes for 10 years but has no competition for that period. It runs three levels of service - Supra, Euro and Regular - and thanks to the time frame can really invest in them."

If you're doing your job well, the phone doesn't ring

The motivation for buying Alsa - a deal six years in the making - was profit, of course: "We wanted an operation that has achieved the critical mass, and we want to concentrate on countries, not continents. And we didn't want, or need, a turnaround business."

Which brought me nicely to a final question about business philosophy; what makes NEG tick?

"We're looking for growth in quality earnings. There are short-term strategies that are governed by the last set of results. Short-termism sees costs pared to the bone, and fares bumped up but then you lose the interest of your stakeholders - the passengers. You can't demand their respect, you have to earn it.

"We have some big rules. They are quality, safety and trust first. I have another belief that every one of my staff can do their job better than I can."

White pointed out of his goldfish-bowl office at the workstations surrounding it: "There are 50 people here, but 40,000 elsewhere. At National Express Group, power is devolved to all of those people."

Investing in the future

Martin Cole hears DaimlerChrysler boss Ian Jones' vision for 2006 and beyond

It may be 11 years since the Sprinter first came on the scene, but the panel van, ultra-popular with minibus and minicoach operators, is still a key part of DaimlerChrysler's day-to-day business.

The new Sprinter will be launched at this year's CV Show, where the company will also be bigging-up its BlueTec exhaust after-treatment technology for Euro IV and Euro V emissions on heavy commercial vehicles.

DaimlerChrysler is also confident it has made the correct choice in opting for selective catalytic reduction (SCR) as its route to cleaner emissions.

Ian Jones, managing director of the UK commercial vehicle division, said DaimlerChrysler had invested €6 billion in research and development - equating to €15 million per day - and the resources directed towards emissions technology had worked out in favour of SCR because it would save operators money.

Mr Jones said: "The SCR versus EGR battle has been hyped up in many quarters - and remains a complex set of issues that the majority of operators do not fully understand - and in most cases have not yet decided on a clear path. Mercedes-Benz's position is very clear. We believe that both EGR and SCR technologies have their appropriate place and we've adopted both to optimise the benefits to our customers.

"All the talk has been SCR, but we will sell about 35,000 commercial vehicles a year in the UK of which 25,000 will be EGR and 10,000 SCR.

> **Put simply, SCR is more complex, heavier, and requires handling – but delivers significantly better fuel consumption**
> Ian Jones

"Put simply, SCR is more complex, heavier, and requires handling - but delivers significantly better fuel consumption. In operations where the total benefit of fuel saving outweighs the cost of SCR, we follow the AdBlue route - and in those cases where total fuel cost does not justify, we've adopted EGR.

"Therefore all our Vito and Sprinter vans and the Canter Fuso range of trucks will all use EGR. Our Vario van range and all Mercedes trucks will use SCR - because of the nature of the jobs for which they were designed.

"Where we've fitted EGR, because, in our judgement, that's the most cost effective solution, there is little to argue to justify our position."

Ian Jones

Vehicle trials

Tesco carried out a trial of two identical Merecedes-Benz Axor tractor units; one being Euro III and the other Euro V,

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both operating on the same route, with two drivers alternating each day. Over a four month period, both vehicles travelled around 23,000 miles and the SCR vehicle delivered a half a mile per gallon better than its Euro III equivalent: a 4.7% improvement - same route, same load, same drivers.

Mercedes-Benz carried out numerous internal trials to benchmark Euro IV and Euro V product against existing Euro III. The results show a consistent 3% improvement in overall fuel performance.

Mr Jones added: "EGR competitors claim their fuel performance is the same. But 175,000 vehicles a year sold in the United States and the experience of the majority of European manufacturers suggest that a 3% degradation on a like for like comparison over Euro III is the level we would expect.

"Every CV manufacturer in Europe, bar two, believes a 5-7% fuel consumption advantage justifies the decision to adopt SCR for heavy vehicles - and I think most customers will reach the same conclusion.

"Euro V comes in 2009 and there's no doubt EGR can meet it, but at what additional cost? In our judgement, the fuel penalty is even bigger - which perhaps is why you can't buy a Euro V EGR vehicle today.

"Certainly the Euro V step for SCR is more straightforward - it's a bigger catalyst and more Ad Blue.

"Of the more than 10,000 Euro IV and V vehicles Mercedes-Benz already has on the roads in Europe, 98% of them are Euro V and are Taking advantage of government incentives, particularly in Germany, Holland, Switzerland and Austria.

"The Department for Transport announced that a Euro IV vehicle, registered before October this year would qualify for a reduced pollution certificate - which today is worth £500 on a tractor unit. Yet we have no indication as to what their policy will be for Euro V vehicles after October 1.

"It seems reasonable that a Euro V vehicle should qualify for an RPC on the same basis. I know discussions are underway, but recent examples of legislation implemented at short notice, does little to help manufacturers invest to best meet the needs of UK operators.

"In my view, if there was an RPC for Euro V, then much of the current SCR/EGR debate would simply disappear."

A new twist on an old favourite: the new Sprinter will be launched at the CV Show at the Birmingham NEC next month

Digital tachographs

Ian Jones's other major concern was the lightning implementation of digital tachographs. He said: "Digital tachographs have taken 15 years to finally become part of operating legislation - this has to be one of the slowest and most considered legal changes we've faced - and yet the implementation has hit us like an express train.

"The on-off, on-off status over the last couple of years has forced manufacturers to wait, unsure of what to do - because getting it wrong was simply so expensive. But now at least we know and we've phased its implementation depending on product type and the time it takes to prepare for registration.

"This is still a rushed implementation - and we can anticipate a surge in registrations of all makes of vehicles without digital tachographs before the deadline of May 4 - although even that date is not finally confirmed." ›

The new V6 diesel engine boasts 204 bhp and delivers acceleration of 0-60mph in 8.3 seconds

Dealership investment

Mr Jones was also keen to highlight the investment DaimlerChrysler was making in its dealership network.

He said: "I must emphasise the investment our network is making in providing expanded service facilities around the country. A £100 million investment that has been rolled out over the last three years - 26 brand new or completely refurbished Mercedes-Benz commercial vehicle locations opened just in the last 12 months - a doubling of the service locations throughout the UK over the last three years - as well as big investments in people, parts inventory, systems and breakdown services.

"The majority operate 24 hours a day - all of them operate on extended hours and all of them have access to rolling road brake testers and tachograph testing facilities."

CV Show plans

New developments for release at the CV Show this year include a revised Vito range. Quality improvement comes from a new zinc coating process which covers both sides of all the panels and will greatly improve durability and anti-corrosion. The firewall dampening around the engine bulkhead has been increased - making it safer and quieter inside the cab area and the ESP electronic stability package has been upgraded to 'ESP Adaptive' - where the new function continually monitors where the centre of gravity lies and factors it into the control system. This means shifting loads will be detected and compensated for to increase cornering and braking stability.

The Vito 120 CDi will get a new V6 diesel engine

One of the most dramatic changes is the availability of a new V6 diesel engine developing 204 bhp and delivering acceleration of 0-60mph in 8.3 seconds. It will be installed in the Vito 120 CDi and will cost £18,885 - including air conditioning and an eight-speed automatic gearbox.

Later this year Vito 111 and 115 CDi models will also gain a permanent four-wheel-drive option and customers will also be able to specify 17-inch alloy wheels and Start Assist.

Euro IV changes will see all the EGR diesel units switch to piezoelectric fuel injectors for improved emissions and greater control over combustion processes. There are also power increases with the previous 109bhp model boosted to 114bhp and the smaller 88bhp unit is raised to 94bhp.

Vario had been threatened with discontinuation but a reprieve has seen it taken to Euro IV level using BlueTec SCR to achieve low emissions. The basic form is gaining a facelift and it will have engine options of 129, 156 and 177bhp on both 6.0t and 7.5t chassis.

First launched in 1995, the Sprinter saw a number of upgrades and the latest total revision is aiming high because all the major competition is launching new models in the run up to Euro IV implementation.

A lot of technology has been adopted to enhance styling, comfort and safety. It features a complete new cockpit area with ergonomic styling and high quality materials. The driver area is also safer thanks to a significant increase in the effectiveness of the crumple-zone area at the front of the vehicle. It shares the 88bhp engine with the Vito and has options of 150bhp or a V6 184bhp unit. Gearbox options are a six-speed manual or an eight-speed automatic.

Standard specification includes a CD player, electric windows and central locking. Roof options include standard, high and super high - with the latter on the extra-long body giving 17.3 cubic metres of saloon space. Weight options will be 3.0t, 3.5t and 5.0t and the latter can be fitted with super-single wheels and tyres to increase the flat-floor area between the rear wheel arches.

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How to...

Use a Digital Tachograph

Digitachs cost a lot of money, changing over is going to be a hassle, they won't store speed data for longer than 24 working hours and they won't automatically let you know when driver's hours have run out... But they are simple enough for even a tachograph novice like Andrew Peace to understand

They might be priced slightly differently, and have slightly different buttons on the front, but to all intents and purposes all three types of digital tachograph currently on the market - Siemens, Actia and Stoneridge - are the same, the law has made them that way.

They are all designed to suit the European 1360/2002 Annex 1b regulations exactly, which means they will store 365 days worth of driver's activities, events and anomalies data, and 24 driving hour's worth of speed and over-speed records.

This means - unless you opt for the collision data or journey data recorders available from each manufacturer - that if you have an accident more than 24 hours driving time from home, and the data is not downloaded on the spot by the authorities, then you are not going to be able to produce tachograph evidence to back up your driver's version of events.

But the upside of the machines themselves being so similar is that all the accessories like printer paper and download tools are interchangeable, and a 'no-sponsorship' rule for testing stations means that they will all be able to use, and calibrate, all types of digitach.

Currently around 120 stations are certified to work with digitachs, and the other 500+ are all in the process of being accredited.

Calibration

Digitachs must be inspected and calibrated at least every two years by a certified testing station. But they also need to be inspected if the sensors have been changed, the wheel circumference altered by more or less than 4% from the 'L' value recorded on the calibration plate (normally on the door pillar), the unit has been repaired, the VRN has been changed or the UTC time is wrong by more than 20 minutes.

CBW's Andrew Peace attended a Siemens VDO training course

The stations cannot repair digitachs themselves. Each digitach needs both operational and security certification, the latter provided by the manufacturer. The memory on a digitach cannot (legally) be erased, if anything serious goes wrong the unit can only be opened up by the manufacturer.

If the unit is faulty and data cannot be downloaded, the testing station can produce a 'certificate of undownloadability'. Data is only copied, not deleted, when downloaded.

UTC time

Do not listen to any of the scare stories surrounding UTC time. It is, especially for UK operators, very easy to understand.

UTC - Universal Time Co-ordinated - is the same as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). So for half the year in the UK, UTC is the same as our local time.

In summer, obviously, we jump an hour ahead, which is when UTC becomes a little more complicated, as it does when driving on the continent. Even so, it is still straightforward and easy to calculate.

The formula to work out UTC is as follows - you just need to know, er, the time, the time zone you are in, and whether it is summer or not. Easy!

UTC = local time - (Time zone offset +

summer time offset)*

** Always work out the sum in the brackets first*

■ **For UK in winter:**
UTC = local time - (0 + 0)
Therefore, UTC = local time

■ **For UK in summer:**
UTC = local time - (0+1)
Therefore, UTC = local time - 1 hour

■ **For France in summer:**
UTC = local time - (1 + 1)
Therefore, UTC = local time - 2 hours

Cards

There are four kinds of cards available for use with a digitach: drivers, company, workshop and control cards. Only the driver's card stores data, the other three are 'keys' and allow access to the data stored on the machine itself.

Controls and display

1. Driver select key
2. Card slots – the driver's card should always be in slot one
3. Download/ calibration interface
4. Warning light
5. Scroll/enter/ back button
6. Printer roll
7. Driver one info:
⊙ - driving icon
▬ - card inserted
8. Interface
9. Time
10. Activity icon
⊙ - Driving
11. Speed
12. Driver two info:
▬ - card inserted
▨ - period of availability

Above left: the download tool allows data to be transferred. Driver cards and print-outs – soon to be a very familiar site in your office

The laws governing how often the data should be downloaded from the driver's card and the machine have not been set or enacted yet, and will be different in each European Union country. It is expected that the driver's card will have to be downloaded every 28 days, and the machine every three months.

Driver's card

The white driver's card holds 28 driving days worth of time, distance and activity data, but does not record speed data. It is valid for five years, is available from the DVLA and costs £38. The driver's card is a personal document and is fully transferable between operators. Currently, applications for driver's cards - using form D777B - are being processed by return, but obviously that situation will change as the implementation date gets nearer.

Company card

The yellow company card only allows access to data stored in the digitach that relates to that company. (If inserted at the same time as the driver's card then it can access this data too).

It should be 'locked in' when the company takes delivery of a new or hired vehicle, and 'locked out' when the company disposes of the vehicle. Locking in and out ring fences the data to your company only, and will prevent a subsequent owner or hirer gaining access to your data.

It is valid for five years, is available from the DVLA and costs £38. Each digitach can accept a maximum of 2,232 company cards, although in practise each company with different operating centres should have duplicate company cards rather than separate ones for each operating centre.

Control card

The blue control card is issued to authorities like VOSA and the Police and permits access to all data stored on the digitach, and on the driver's card if it is inserted as well. It is valid for only two years.

Workshop card

The red workshop card is only issued to technicians at an approved testing centre, not to vehicle technicians at operators' depots (vehicles can be driven without cards). It is only valid for one year and is issued to each technician personally, to their home address, after completion of a VOSA course. This card permits unlimited access to data stored on the machine.

Digitachs in use

The digitach records driving time automatically, but some non-driving tasks will be undertaken - before and after shifts, or during the working day - which still count towards the Working Hours Directive and Driving Hours regulations. In these cases, working modes have to be input manually. But with just a few buttons to press, how complicated can this be?

If there is just one driver on this shift then he/she should put the card in the left slot, the second or co-driver should put their card in the right hand slot.

On the Siemens DTCO 1381 *CBW* used, the card has to be pushed quite far in before the machine 'grabs' it. ›

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Drivers logging on

At the start of the shift, or the start of the driving time - depending on whether the vehicle was available at the start of the shift or not - the driver will need to log on to the system. After turning on the ignition, to log on the driver should simply insert his/her card - arrow forward, chip up - and follow the basic instructions shown on the display.

At log-in the machine will automatically run through three stages - it will initially display local and UTC time, then the driver's surname and a 'progress bar' as data on the card is read and then will change to the date and (UTC) time when the most recent card was withdrawn.

The first input stage is when the machine asks if any manual entries need to be made. If not, the machine will go on to ask which country the shift is starting in, followed by - only if you are in Spain - the region.

Then the standard display will appear, and you can start driving.

If the vehicle was not available to the driver at the start of the shift, or the driver did work at the end of the previous shift after logging off, then this information must all be input manually at the login stage. All time data input into the digitach must be in UTC.

On the road

When the vehicle is stationary, the digitach will record activity as 'other work period'. As soon as the vehicle moves off, the digitach will automatically switch to driving mode. What this means is that when the vehicle is stationary in a traffic jam, for instance, the digitach assumes you are not driving, and hence this data will not be recorded against total driving time. If the driver drives continuously for four hours 15 minutes then the unit will display a warning message, and illuminate a red light after four hours 30 minutes.

Drivers taking breaks must manually change the activity mode to 'break', otherwise the machine will record it as 'other work period' and it will count towards the driver's hours. Similarly, the co-driver's time will be recorded as 'availability'. Train journeys and ferry crossings should be recorded in the same way.

Downloading

The manufacturers will all offer their own version of the 'download tool', a mass storage device that fits into the six-pin plug on the front of the digitach.

Siemens VDO product manager Peter Needham supervises at the training day

This is how the data from the digitach will be transferred to a computer for analysis. Siemen's version costs £179 and has enough capacity to hold 60 three-monthly downloads, or 15 full downloads. It also has a USB port to insert straight into most PCs.

Driver's card data can be downloaded through any card-reading device, which are widely available even on the high street, and will read a month's data in around one minute.

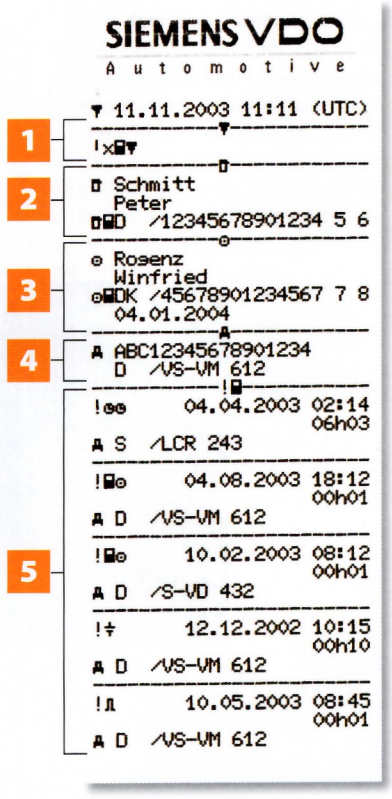
The print out

1. The type of print out:
   - ! Event
   - X Fault
   - Driver card
   - ▼ Print out
2. Card in slot 1:
   - Control icon - control card holder details
3. Card in slot 2:
   - ⊙ Driver icon - driver details
4. Vehicle details
5. List of all saved events on the driver card:

Line 1 - Pictogram of event/fault, date and time

Line 2 - Duration of event or fault

Line 3 - Authorising member state and registration number of vehicle on which fault/ event happened



For more information on Siemens VDO training days, call 0121 326 1231 or visit *www.my-fis.co.uk*

Analysing the data

Data processing is where the real benefits of digitachs will be seen, allowing many companies to by pass tachograph agencies and do the analysis themselves, at the click of a button.

The complication will come from analysing both analogue and digital data during the change over period, but many companies are offering services that will amalgamate the two forms of data, and analyse it together.

Siemen's service, Tachograph Information Systems, is an internet based system that will accept both sources. Storage of the raw data - as demanded by the regulatory authorities - and analysis done according to customer requirements will cost around £30 per driver/year. See *www.tis-web.co.uk* for more details.

What now?

Peter Needham, product manager at Siemens's VDO who ran the training day that *CBW* attended said: "Many people are frightened by digital tachographs and do not know what to do.

"Basically they need to get prepared and address the two main areas. Firstly, training. People need to understand how easy it is - once they understand that, both operators and drivers become much friendlier towards it. If people are not trained then they will become unnecessarily alienated from it.

"Secondly, people need to think how they will deal with the data, and decide what is the best way for them."

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to *jack.thorpe@rouncymedia.co.uk* or write to the address on page 3

LOCHS & GLENS

Tour specialist Lochs & Glens Holidays has taken delivery of five Volvo 13.75m B12Bs.

The order completes a three-year plan to replace the company's entire 15-vehicle fleet with longer-length Volvo coaches.

Lochs and Glens' transport manager Brian Nichols said: "The tri-axle B12Bs have been the ideal vehicle for us. Passengers love the comfort and the generous leg room, while we've had excellent feedback from our drivers on the I-Shift gearbox.

"We're delighted that our renewal plan is now complete and that all of our fleet can boast the same, high standards."

The Jonckheere Mistral 70-bodied vehicles feature Volvo's DH12D engine, rated at 420bhp, coupled to the I-Shift gearbox. Passenger comfort is a priority, so despite the longer length, the coaches are specified with just 57 seats, allowing plenty of legroom, as well as full climate control, centre sunken toilet and hot and cold drinks facilities.

Family-run Lochs & Glens, based at Gartochran, near the banks of Loch Lomond, specialise in organising tours to its beautifully-situated hotels, each of which overlooks a Scottish loch. It sub-contracts operators for many of its tours from England.

FACT FILE

Chassis/Body Volvo B12B/ Mistral 70 13.75m
Engine 420bhp
Transmission I-Shift
Seats 57
Spec Climate control, toilet, fridge
Bought from Volvo Coach Sales 01509 217700

GARNETTS COACHES

Day trippers with Garnetts Coaches of Bishop Auckland, Co Durham, will get a surprise when their coach rounds the corner.

This stunning, yellow Sunsundegui will be setting off with them to a range of resorts including Blackpool, the Lake District, York and Edinburgh, and sneaking off on the family-run company's Mystery Tour destinations.

Garnetts already has four Volvo B7Rs in its fleet but this is the first time it has opted for the distinctive Sunsundegui body. Now, sporting the firm's striking yellow livery, it certainly stands out from the crowd.

The 53-seater features a 275bhp 7-litre engine coupled to a ZF six-speed automatic gearbox. On board it has full air conditioning, TV, toilet and fridge.

"We've had Volvo for a number of years," said fleet operations manager, Paul Garnett. "We've always been pleased with their performance and reliability and most of our fitters are Volvo-trained," he explained.

"This time, however, we opted for the Sunsundegui Sideral because it looks different... and that's what we want. We want to turn heads and we're confident the new vehicle will do just that."

Garnetts has built steadily over the last four years, benefiting when Go-Ahead took over OK Motor Services and reduced its coach workings. From a fleet of 10 it now has around 30 coaches, two thirds of which are on home-to-school contracts.

The first outing for the Sunsundegui will be the Mother's Day Special: "It always sells out," said Mr Garnett. "Through the summer we run more than 250 departures, going all over the UK, including carrying groups of children to theme parks as well as the more traditional market."

Garnetts has several shops acting as agent for its day trips, plus its own booking office.

FACT FILE

Chassis/Body Volvo B7R/ Sunsundegui Sideral
Engine 275bhp
Transmission ZF six-speed auto
Seats 53
Spec Air con, toilet, fridge
Bought from Volvo Coach Sales 01509 217700

Gordon Robertson hands over the keys to Mark Perkins

ELCOCK REISEN

Telford-based coach operator Elcock Reisen has become the first operator to take delivery of an Esker Touring based on a Mercedes-Benz Atego 1523LL chassis.

Supplied by Harry Ferguson Coach sales, the Esker Touring features 37 Esteban Ergos reclining seats trimmed with leather headrest inserts and piping cord to the edges, three point lap and diagonal seat belts, courier seat, gangway carpet, double glazing, air conditioning, Webasto heater, rear toilet compartment, solid wooden table, DVD system and display monitor, PA and 10-disc CD multichanger.

Mark Perkins of Elcock Reisen is seen here with Gordon Robertson of Harry Ferguson Coach Sales.

FACT FILE

Chassis/Body Mercedes-Benz Atego 1523LL
Engine OM906, Euro III
Transmission Manual six-speed
Seats 37
Spec Double glazing, air con, toilet, CD/DVD
Bought from Harry Ferguson Coach Sales 01501 762266

McCONN DUALWAY

Irish coach and bus operator McConn Dualway has taken delivery of a trio of new vehicles within the last month, replacing a quarter of their coach fleet in what is described as a major upgrade in terms of comfort and standards.

David McConn, general manager of the Co. Dublin-based firm, told *CBW*: "With the new delivery including a fullsize, midi and minicoach, the new vehicles will make an immediate impact across all areas of our coaching business.

"We had a strong year in 2005, and we're very much looking to the future, and with 2006 being Ryder Cup year there will be a lot of focus on Ireland, and we feel that we need to raise our levels of service and comfort as part of our drive to provide the very highest standards of quality to the travelling public."

The largest of the new coaches is a 53-seater DAF with Marcopolo bodywork, purchased through Bartons of Maynooth, who have been having some success in getting these vehicles into the Irish market. The finish includes full aircon, fully reclining seats, DVD, fridge, head and footrests.

Used for private hire and inbound tours, the Marcopolo has already been proving its worth. "This is a very popular coach with our drivers," Mr McConn told us. "We haven't had any problems at all with it in the first few weeks."

The midi-size vehicle is a 33-seater Esker Cimo, fitted to the same standard of comfort as the larger vehicle, with aircon, fully reclining seats, DVD and fridge. "It's a real looker," Mr McConn said. "And we've already had enquiries from people who've seen it on the road and are impressed. It's a very modern looking design."

David McConn. Top: Major coach fleet upgrade for Dualway

Filling the need for a upgrade of the minicoach fleet, a 29-seat Mercedes Indcar Wing 814 has also joined the fleet, supplied by Noones of Maynooth, and again fitted to the same standard as the larger vehicles. "It's a step up in terms of quality from our older vehicles, and we plan to use this for small private hire and day tour work," Mr McConn added.

"2005 was a good year on the coaching side. And we're keenly aware that to retain our market share and grow we've got to raise our game and keep moving forward."

During 2006 Dualway will be one of many Irish coach operators submitting tenders to Bus Éireann for Ryder Cup transport services, but the Rathcoole-based operator is also looking to develop its service bus network, and this month launches a new weekly bus and tram ticket in partnership with LUAS operator Connex. The ticket, priced at €25 will allow unlimited travel on the red and green tram lines, as well as on Dualway's local and commuter bus routes in southwest Dublin. In connection with this, frequency on the Village Link 2311 service, which links into the tram network at Tallaght, is being upgraded.

Dualway is keen to upgrade and create further local transport links, but is being hampered by the current legislative framework, which does not allow independents to receive grants or subvention which is available to the larger, state-run companies.

"The 2311 is holding its own, but it would do better if we had access to the kind of NDP (National Development Plan) funding available to Bus Atha Cliath," Mr McConn told us, adding that provision of infrastructure such as bus stops was very expensive, and also mired in delays due to the number of different bodies involved.

"We've been trying to get approval for our own bus stops along the 2311, which would really help to boost business, as we are not allowed to have our timetables on the Dublin Bus poles, but it's taking a long time to get anywhere on this."

Dualway also operates a large fleet of open-toppers in Dublin, under the City Sightseeing branding, and continues to add new built-to-order lowfloor open-toppers to the fleet at a rate of one a year, while purchasing second-hand midlife Olympians through Ensign from competitor Dublin Bus, to update the older part of the fleet.

The city tour market in Dublin showed only modest growth in 2005, despite the introduction of the Routemaster-operated language tour, a fact which McConn attributes to hugely disruptive roadworks on O'Connell Street.

"Both ourselves and the Dublin Bus City Tour have had stops shifted around during the redevelopment project, and the state of the street with multiple excavations and hoardings down the middle has made it a very unattractive location to operate tours from. It's hard to sell tickets in the middle of a building site.

"All of the tourist-dependent businesses on O'Connell Street are hoping that this reconstruction project will be finished before the summer, and if this does happen then I think we could see more growth in the market in 2006."

Both Dublin Bus and City Sightseeing tours hit by roadworks

'UNBREAKABLE GLASS' COULD SAVE WEIGHT AND MONEY

The Dutch company making unbreakable windows says it is hoping to get into the bus market.

GE Plastics, which makes Lexan polycarbonates, offers a 10-year guarantee against breakage for its new Lexan Margard glazing and says its special outer layer is resistant to graffiti and scratching. Above all, it would save 50% of the weight of glass.

"Margard is also much easier to install than glass, being lighter and not prone to breakage," said global product manager Joanna Wolska. "The coating doesn't only make it harder to graffiti, but it is very difficult to scratch."

Ms Wolska said that, because of its lower weight, Margard will save on fuel consumption and will help alleviate the problem of overweight vehicles – a real problem with modern, heavyweight coaches. Glass weighs as much as 12 kilograms per square metre, compared to less than 6kg for Lexan.

Margard comes in 26 versions, four of which are suited to bus and coach use. One is designed for flat glass replacement, such as bus side windows, while others are deformable and can be moulded into complex curves for specialised areas. All, she said, have high optical clarity.

The glazing materials can be laminated with glass, giving excellent scratch resistance for the swept areas of windscreens, for example, without the danger of splinters of glass coming inside the vehicle if the screen is attacked. Only the outer, glass laminate layer will shatter, the Lexan interior surface remaining intact.

Margard is lighter than standard glass. Below: Joanna Wolska

GE Plastics has vast experience of making unbreakable laminates, including materials used by security vehicle companies who demand bullet-proof glass for special-build cars and for vans converted to carry prisoners, and for police vehicles. Lexan Margard is also in use in construction and agricultural vehicles.

"So far, our materials have been used for bus stops and for separation screens on PSVs," said Ms Wolska. Margard also meets US transportation regulations and is in use in aircraft, trains and tram systems. It is used in Eurostar trains as the roof-mounted light diffusers.

One of the more unusual properties of Margard is that it blocks ultraviolet light very effectively. This has benefits in reducing skin exposure to UV, which causes skin cancers, and from an operational point of view, helps prevent fading of seat fabrics and curtains.

One version of Margard is able to substantially reduce transmitted infrared light – the cause of overheating in heavily glazed vehicles. Ms Wolska said the result on buses and coaches is hugely reduced demand on the air-conditioning system together with the fuel saving this will produce.

Current – and complex - UK Construction and Use regulations may, however, stand in the way of the introduction of Margard to coaches and buses. For example, the 1987 amended regulation demands that double-deck coaches have either a second staircase or glass hammers which can break any of the side windows. However, where emergency doors are provided there may be no necessity for breakable glass in some vehicles such as small buses.

■ GE Plastics can be contacted in the Netherlands at Plasticslaan 1, 4612 PX Bergen op Zoom, The Netherlands, via website *www.geplastics.com* or by phone on +31 164-31 70 38

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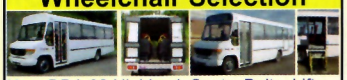

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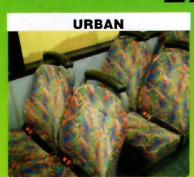

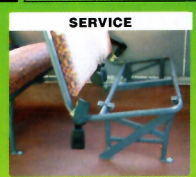

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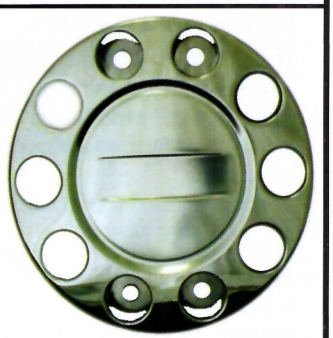

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Baching mad

Classical music - played to put young yobs off hanging around a bus station - is driving local residents mad.

A new £4.5 million station in Stanley, Co Durham, has been piping in music from the likes of Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms in a bid to deter anti-social behaviour, but sleep-deprived neighbours say the idea is proving to be anti-social in itself.

While complaints about bad behaviour at the station have fallen, nearby residents have complained that the 24-hour mini-concerto is keeping them awake at night.

Gavin Wilson, 27, told the *Daily Telegraph*: "I am sick of it. But we can't go to the police because it was their idea."

The system was introduced by Derwentside district council following talks with police and Go Northern. It spent about £1,000 on a PA system and six CDs, which are played on a loop.

But Inspector Ian Proud, of Stanley police, says the residents may soon be sleeping easy. He said a glitch in the system had stopped the music from shutting off at 10pm as planned.

Beethoven: not your average yob

Nigel Wilson, transportation division director

New faces at Faber Maunsell

Transport specialist Faber Maunsell has strengthened its transportation division with four new appointments.

Derek Gittens has joined the firm's Newcastle office as associate director. As integrated transport manager at Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Derek worked on the introduction of quality bus routes and the Tees Valley bus network review.

Liam Ryan is a new face at Faber's Redhill office, where, as a principal engineer, he is working on a number of public and private sector projects in the south east.

The company's Leeds office has two new recruits - Nigel Wilson and Richard Sherwood. Nigel has returned to Faber Maunsell after a 14-month break. Having previously spent 13 years with the company, including a stint as regional director, Nigel has taken up the position of director in the transportation division.

Richard is the new senior consultant in the transport planning team. Formerly a senior transport planner at Atkins, Richard has experience in a number of transport planning projects.

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OBITUARY

Ted Watson

On March 2 the funeral took place in Stanley, Co Durham, of Mr Edward L Watson, who died peacefully on February 23, aged 83.

Born in Burnopfield, Co Durham, Ted served in the RAF during the war, flying in Lancaster bombers. On his return to the North East he started his long career in the transport business: beginning with limousines and progressing to coaches.

With his wife, Esther, Ted built up Watsons Coaches until at its peak it operated mine workers' contracts, services, local excursions and UK and Continental coach tours.

He was well-liked and respected by all who knew him, both in his personal life and in business, and he will always be remembered as a true gentleman.

After retiring several years ago, Mr and Mrs Watson enjoyed holidays in Tenerife. The devoted couple celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary in 2004.

Ted is survived by his wife, and their daughter, Sybil.

Two minute interview

Full name Roland Eglinton
Age 27
Occupation Operations manager, Chalkwell Coach Hire & Tours

Is the PSV industry on its way up, down or static?
I think there are plenty of opportunities. The next five years are going to be interesting, given how legislation has started to affect things like fleet replacement.

Which recent legislation has been most irritating or useless? DDA. Well intentioned, poorly thought out. It's alright for buses, but why target express coaches?

Give the industry's business managers 20 words of helpful advice... Stop complaining about things beyond your control and focus on selling the benefits of what you do to potential customers.

Who, in the last 50 years, has been most influential in the industry and why?
The hundreds of grass-roots operators out there, who do the job year in year out to the best of their ability. They are the lifeblood of the industry.

Which vehicle – coach, bus, motorcycle or car – do you love the most, and why?
Car-wise, I don't like anything too flashy. Maybe an Audi TT.

If you asked your best friend or partner, what would they say is your worst attribute?
My wife says I'm stubborn. I disagree.

Who would play you in the film version of the story of your life?
I would have to play myself. I'm one of a kind!

Who would you have as your co-star? Angelina Jolie, if only for the bedroom scenes.

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- Deal / negotiate with coach operators
- Supervise / manage the operations department

The successful applicant must have experience in the transportation industry in addition to a good geographical knowledge and a systematic approach to detail.

In addition to a salary of 25 - 35k (based on experience) we offer a performance bonus and 30 days paid annual leave.

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Docklands Light Railway

serco bringing service to life

Expressions of interest are invited from Bus Operators to supply Railway Replacement Bus Services to Serco Docklands, the operator of the Docklands Light Railway. Operators interested in tendering for this work should provide:

- A capability statement demonstrating their ability to provide or source up to 30 buses per weekend day and a description of how they intend to provide these buses

- A summary of their previous record in provision of railway replacement services, including the name and telephone number of at least two suitable referees

- Details of any Health & Safety prohibition notices within the last 5 years and a copy of their CPC holder's certificate

Submissions are to arrive no later than **09:00 Monday 3rd April**, addressed to:

Mr John Walker
Contracts & Procurement Manager
Serco Docklands Ltd
Castor Lane
Poplar
London
E14 0DS

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To reserve your space, please call **Gary Kemp** on **01733 293247.**
Please note that the booking deadline is Monday at noon, prior to Wednesday's publication.

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FINANCE AVAILABLE ON THE ABOVE VEHICLES (SUBJECT TO STATUS) VAT ELEMENT ONLY REQUIRED AS DEPOSIT, BALANCE OVER 48 MONTHS (Written details on request)

2000 X REG FORD TRANSIT 150 DIESEL

5 SPEED MANUAL, LONG WHEEL BASE, PAS, HIGH ROOF, HIGH SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH LOW STEP, 8 HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING FOR W/ CHAIRS, RICON TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, LOW MILES, 36,000 MILES.

T REG IVECO 59.12

2.8 DIESEL TURBO, MELLOR COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 16 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, PLS FULLY AUTOMATIC TAIL LIFT, FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, LOW MILES 66,000 KMS

V REG MERCEDES SPRINTER 410D

TURBO DIESEL, PAS, LWB, HIGH ROOF, MELLOR CONVERSION, FRONT ENTRY SIDE DOOR WITH LOW STEP, 15 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFFE UNDER-FLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, CHOICE.

1996 P REG MERCEDES 609D

WADHAM COACHBUILT BODY,LWB, P A S, FULL HEIGHT DOOR,16 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S OR 6 WHEEL CHAIRS & 4 SEATED, UNWIN TRACKING,RATCLIFF TAIL LIFT, EBERSPACHER HEATER, EX LOCAL COUNCIL ,GOOD CONDITION

X REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL, 5 SPEED, PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, HIGH ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION, ONE OWNER

Y REG 2001 VOLKSWAGEN TRANSPORTER

2.5TDI AUTOMATIC, POWERED STEERING, MWB, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 5 SEATS PLUS 1 WHEELCHAIR, UNWIN TRACKING, WITH SIDE MOUNTED RICON TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, MINT CONDITION, 33,000

1999 T REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, L W B, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 11 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, 52,000 MILES. V GOOD CONDITION , ONE OWNER

X REG 2001 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, PAS, 12 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 63,000 MILES CHOICE OF TWO

2000 V REG PEUGEOT BOXER

2.5 DIESEL ,5 SPEED ,PAS, L W B, EXCEL CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 12 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS , UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, V GOOD CONDITION, ONE OWNER

51 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT28

2.5 TURBO DIESEL, PAS, SHORT WHEEL BASE, LOW ROOF, TWIN SIDE LOADING DOORS WITH STEP,8 PASSENGER HIGH BACK SEATS WITH HEADREST, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 36,000 MILES. IDEAL TAXIS

Y REG TOYOTA HIACE

2.4 DIESEL,5 SPEED ,PAS, MEDIUM WHEEL BASE, LOW ROOF, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 3 SEATS 7 TWO WHEEL CHAIR POSITIONS,Q-SRAINT RESTRAINT SYSTEM, RICON FULLY AUTOMATIC TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER MINT CONDITION , 33,000 miles

2001 Y REG RENAULT MASTER

MM33, 2.2 DCI, 5 SPEED, PAS, MWB, O & H CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 7 SEATS PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR SPACES, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER

V REG VOLKSWAGEN LT46

TURBO DIESEL, PAS, LWB, WHITACRES CONVERSION, LARGE POWER PLUG DOOR, HIGH ROOF, 16 REMOVABLE HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RATCLIFFE UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER, COIF.

2003 03 REG RENAULT TRAFIC 100

1.9 DCI, 5 SPEED ,PAS, SHORT WHEEL BASE, O & H CONVERSION, SIDE LOADING DOOR, 8 SEATS PLUS DRIVER, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER MINT CONDITION ,18,000 miles

51 REG IVECO 40.C13

2.9 TURBO DIESEL, PAS, IRIS CONVERSION 16 HIGH BACK SEATS. SLAM FRONT ENTRY DOOR, HIGH ROOF ,BONDED WINDOWS , M2 TESTED FLOOR, UNWIN TRACKING, HEATER, UNDERFLOOR RATCLIFF TAIL LIFT, LOW MILEAGE 43,000 KMS .

04 REG 2004 RENAULT MASTER T35

2.5, 5 SPEED,PAS, LONG WHEEL BASE, MELLOR CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 14 SEATS OR 10 PLUS 2 WHEEL CHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION, 16,000 MILES

02 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

2.5 TURBO DIESEL 109 BHP, PAS, LUXURY SPEC FRANK GUY CONVERSION, TWIN SLD'S, TINTED WINDOWS, 10 HIGH BACK SEATS,OVER HEAD LOCKERS, WITH AIR & LAMPS REAR STORAGE AREA, EBERSPACHER CLIMATE CONTROL, EX DEMO 16,000 MILES

52 REG RENAULT MASTER

LM35, 2.DCI , 5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 12 SEATS, GLIDE RITE LOWERING SUSPENSION WITH FOLD OUT RAMP, UNWIN TRACKING, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 55,000 MILES

NEW 06 REG, IVECO 40.C13

2.9 TURBO DIESEL IRIS CONVERSION 14 HIGH BACK COGENT SEATS. DOUBLE FRONT PASSENGER SEAT, SIDE-LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, M2 FLOOR, LOTS OF SPACE, DELIVERY MILEAGE ONLY, IN STOCK

2002 52 REG FORD TRANSIT 350

LONG WHEEL BASE, TURBO DIESEL, AUTOMATIC, PAS, HIGH ROOF SIDE ENTRY DOOR WITH STEP,12 HIGH BACK SEATS ,UNWIN TRACKING FOR 2 W/ CHAIRS RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT,ONE OWNER, VERY LOW MILES 5500 MILES

NEW UN REGISTERED VOLKSWAGEN LT46

TURBO DIESEL, VDL KUSTER CONVERSION, 16 SEATS. LARGE POWER PLUG DOOR, HIGH ROOF, BONDED WINDOWS , LOW M2 FLOOR, M2 HIGH BACK SEATS 3 WHEEL CHAIR POSITIONS ,TRACKING, HEATER, LOWERED FLOOR WITH FOLD OUT SIDE RAMP

T REG 1999 FORD TRANSIT 2.5 TD

MANUAL,CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BODY, P A S, 15 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEAT'S,UNWIN TRACKING, RICON UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, SLIDING DOOR FRONT ENTRY,ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 48,000 MILES

W REG IVECO TURBO DAILY CREWCAB

2.9 TURBO DIESEL, PAS, FITTED WITH DROPSIDE STEEL BODY TIPPER AND PTO WITH HEAVY DUTY AIR COMPRESSOR FOR KANGOO'S ETC ONLY 90HRS ORANGE LIGHT BAR AND TOOL LOCKER, ONE OWNER ONLY 43,000 MILES MINT CONDITION.

04 REG, VOLKSWAGEN LT35

MWB, 2.5 TURBO DIESEL 109 BHP,PAS, ADVACED CONVERSION, SLD, 8 HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER, REAR BULK HEAD FITTED WITH MICROWAVE AND HANDWASH REAR STORAGE AREA WITH HAND WASH AND TOOL STORAGE, EX DEMO 16,000 MILES

VOLKSWAGEN LT35 2.5 TURBO DIESEL

NEW UN REGISTERED. LWB, UPRATED TO 3850KGS GVW, 15 ABACUS HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER,.SLIDING SIDE DOOR WITH AVS STEP, HIGH ROOF, UNWIN TRACKING, AMF PLS FULLY AUTOMATIC INTERNAL TAIL LIFT, NEW CONVERSION IN STOCK